

Dubois and Washington

Establish the Context:

- Based on what you know about the units of study we have already covered what are the legal rights African Americans have been granted?
- Describe the status of African Americans during the Progressive Era.

W.E.B Du Bois:

Describe the background of the individual.

What is his position on Civil Rights? Use specific information from ABC-CLIO and Primary source.

Booker T. Washington:

Describe the background of the individual.

What is his position on Civil Rights? Use specific information from ABC-CLIO and Primary source.

Evaluation: Booker T. Washington v. W.E.B. DuBois: Whose strategy do you believe would be most effective in improving the economic, political, and social status of the African-American community? Think about the historical context of the Progressive Era.

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W.E.B. Du Bois

W.E.B. Du Bois was born in the small Massachusetts town of Great Barrington in 1868. While few African Americans lived there, white racism was a daily presence in his life. At the age of 15, while still a high school student, Du Bois became a correspondent for the *New York Globe*. His early writing focused on the problems of African Americans and the necessity of political action to combat racism.



Although Du Bois wanted to attend Harvard, he and his family could not afford the tuition. After high school, he headed south to Fisk University. In the South, he learned more about racism. He also spent his summers teaching in a rural school, in order to learn more about the South and its people.

After three years at Fisk, Du Bois transferred to Harvard with scholarship assistance. Though he received a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1890 and a master's degree in 1891, Du Bois never felt completely at home there. "I was in Harvard but not of it," he said years later.

A Broader Horizon

Du Bois went on to one of the world's foremost universities, the University of Berlin in Germany. There, he combined the study of philosophy, history, economics, and politics. His use of these disciplines in scientific social research won him recognition as the father of the social sciences. He completed his doctoral thesis, "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in America," and received his Ph.D. from Harvard.

After teaching for a few years, Du Bois accepted a research position at the University of Pennsylvania. He designed and carried out a research project focused on an impoverished part of Philadelphia. After completing that study, he moved to Atlanta University, where he studied Africa and African Americans for the next 13 years.

The Souls of Black Folks

At the beginning of his career, Du Bois thought that racism stemmed from ignorance and could be eradicated through education. As he studied the situation of African Americans in America, he changed his opinion.

In 1903, Du Bois published his most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, insisting that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line." He advocated higher education for the "Talented Tenth" of black youth, who could then lead the rest of the community. He maintained that African Americans needed to take political action to combat racism. The only way to make progress, he said, was to "educate and agitate."

Du Bois' position brought him into conflict with Booker T. Washington, who was acknowledged as a leader of the African-American community in America. Washington said African Americans should give up the struggle for

"political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education of Negro youth. They should concentrate all their energies on industrial education."

Soon, Du Bois led a series of meetings that led to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He began a decades-long term as editor of the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*.

Into the 20th Century

In the 1930s, Du Bois left the NAACP, frustrated that it remained an organization led by white people. He returned to Atlanta University, continued his research and writing, and documented the contributions of African Americans to Reconstruction and the contributions of Africa to world civilization. He also attacked imperialism, which kept most of Africa in colonial subjugation. He advocated nuclear disarmament and was sympathetic to communism. The U.S. government indicted him as a "foreign agent," but he was acquitted.

Du Bois left the United States, declaring in a visit to Peking, "In my own country for nearly a century I have been nothing but a NIGGER." He moved to Ghana, becoming a Ghanaian citizen and a member of the Communist Party. He spent the last years of his life in Ghana and died in 1963, on the eve of the March on Washington for Jobs and Justice.

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Booker T. Washington

As the head of Tuskegee Institute (a leading center of African American education), Booker Taliaferro Washington was a major spokesperson for his race in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He believed that African Americans should advance through education and effort instead of seeking social and political equality with whites.



Washington was born a slave on April 5, 1856 on a plantation near Hale's Ford, Franklin County, Virginia. His father was an unknown white man; his mother was a cook on a plantation. After being emancipated in 1865, Washington's family moved to Malden, West Virginia, where he went to work in the salt furnaces and later in a coal mine. Imbued with a strong desire to get an education, Washington managed to take classes at night.

In 1872, at the age of 16, Washington entered Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia. Here, he came under the influence of the school's founder and principal, Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Armstrong emphasized a program of arts and sciences as well as industrial arts that would train African Americans for jobs and instill values. He believed that African Americans would be granted political and civil rights once they had proven themselves worthy of these rights.

Graduating from Hampton with honors in 1875, Washington returned to Malden to teach school. In 1878, he studied briefly at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. before returning to Hampton as a teacher in a program for Native American students. In 1881, Washington became principal of a new state school for African Americans at Tuskegee, Alabama.

From the time of his arrival at Tuskegee, Washington assumed a leadership role. Finding that no land or buildings had been acquired for the school, he went to work winning the support of local whites and recruiting African American students. Thanks to his efforts, Tuskegee opened with 40 students in a dilapidated shanty loaned by the African American Methodist church. From these modest beginnings, Washington built Tuskegee into an institution with 540 acres of land and an enrollment of more than 400 students by 1888.

Like Hampton, Tuskegee offered training in a variety of skilled trades. Boys studied farming and dairying; girls learned cooking, sewing, and other homemaking skills. In the academic departments, the emphasis was on the practical applications of learning rather than learning for its own sake. Washington was also concerned that students be taught the beauty and dignity of labor. In addition, personal hygiene, manners, and moral education were stressed. Unlike Hampton, where the principal and most of the teachers were white, Tuskegee always had an all-African-American staff, including the famous agricultural chemist George Washington Carver. The school became known throughout the country and abroad. Graduates taught in all the Southern states, and institutions modeled on Tuskegee were started elsewhere.

Washington personally devoted a great deal of time and energy to raising money for Tuskegee and publicizing

the school and its philosophy. He was remarkably successful in securing financial aid from white Northern philanthropists, including Andrew Carnegie (who became the largest single donor) and philanthropic foundations such as the Peabody Education Fund, started by George Peabody.

Beginning in 1884, when Washington addressed the National Education Association in Madison, Wisconsin, he was in demand as a public speaker on education and race relations. Washington delivered his most famous speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta in 1895. The essence of his racial philosophy was contained in this statement: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Washington also advised African Americans to remain in the South instead of seeking advancement in the North.

After Washington's Atlanta speech, he was hailed as the spokesperson for his race and the successor to Frederick Douglass, who had died that same year. In 1896, Harvard University awarded Washington an honorary degree. Two years later, he received President William McKinley at Tuskegee, and in 1901, he dined at the White House with President Theodore Roosevelt, who consulted him on appointments and on Southern and racial policies. During Roosevelt's administration and that of William Howard Taft, Washington had more influence than any other African American.

In keeping with Washington's philosophy of economic self-help, he organized and became the head of the National Negro Business League, established in 1900 to help develop and support African American-owned businesses. In 1901, Washington published his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*. A bestseller in the United States and translated into more than a dozen languages, the book established Washington as a prototype of the self-made African American man.

Yet many African American intellectuals, notably Harvard-educated W. E. B. Du Bois, sharply criticized Washington's philosophy and methods. They charged that his emphasis on industrial education over academics limited African Americans to low-paying jobs. They also accused Washington of giving the nod to segregation and the disenfranchisement of African Americans. In fact, recent research has shown that although in public Washington was an accommodationist, in private he worked against disfranchisement and other forms of discrimination. Finally, Washington's critics attacked what they called the Tuskegee Machine, a vast network of graduates and followers, by which Washington maintained his power and sought to silence his opponents.

Washington used his influence in the white community and with African American editors to defend himself and his policies. He tried to weaken both the Niagara movement, started in 1905 by African Americans who disagreed with him, and the biracial National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909. By the time of his death from overwork on November 14, 1915, his philosophy of race relations had fallen out of favor. Nevertheless, Washington's ideas on economic self-reliance remained his lasting legacy.

Further Reading

Harlan, Louis R., *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, 1972; Harlan, Louis R., *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915*, 1983; Thornbrough, Emma Lou, ed., *Booker T. Washington*, 1969.

A Rage for Order

Black/White Relations in the
American South Since Emancipation

JOEL WILLIAMSON

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Booker T. Washington

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A Rage for Order

America. Booker T. Washington offered one alternative, a relatively accommodative one in which blacks would strive to be superbly white but only in areas carefully selected to appear nonaggressive to whites. Washington's appeal to both blacks and whites was almost overwhelming in the turn-of-the-century years. What he would preserve for black people were precisely those things, religion aside, they held most dear: the farm, the family, and education. What he gave up were claims to things that blacks in a large measure had already lost in fact if not in law: physical integration and full political participation. Moreover, by giving up demands for integration in public places and universal male suffrage, he seemed also to surrender any claim to the "social equality" that so thoroughly frightened whites.

Washington and his program came to stage center on the speaker's platform of the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition in 1895, the very year Frederick Douglass died. In an address given as a part of the opening ceremonies, he called upon both whites and blacks to "put down their buckets" where they were, to come to terms with one another, and to draw upon the rich resources that each afforded the other. Black people had been loyal to their masters during the war, they had labored faithfully, and they would be loyal to white employers now and work "without strikes and labour wars." The white South after emancipation had given black people "a man's chance in the commercial world." For future progress, black and white had only to band together again, to deal with one another in a spirit of trust as they had in the past. Implicit in his words was the program he had followed at Tuskegee with signal success for more than a dozen years, a program that he had evolved out of his experience at Hampton Institute. In the exchange as offered in 1895, black people would accept some things and expect others. Washington symbolized his idea with a dramatic gesture. He held up his right hand, fingers spread. "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers," he declared. Closing his fingers into a fist, he concluded, "yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." This "Atlanta Compromise," as it came to be called, was Washington's offering to the white people as the basis for an interracial peace. The audience accepted it with thunderous applause, with, indeed, a standing ovation.¹³ It was not, it must be noted, a representative audience. In fact, the stage was filled with Georgia Republicans, a Reconstruction Republican governor had introduced Washington, and a Republican federal judge followed him as speaker. Finally, the whole Exposition was gotten up by business interests as a commercial device to combat the great depression of the 1890s.

Ironically, even as Washington's power grew, the inadequacy of his accommodationism in the face of a rapidly deteriorating state of race relations became increasingly apparent. What changed was not Washington or his racial philosophy, or even his tactics, but rather the racial posture of the white world with which he had to deal. Washington, in essence, had offered an arrangement to whites who were racially conservative, to men who thought of blacks as a people created for a subordinate and serving place in a world dominated by benevolent whites. As the years clicked over the end of the century, however, these people lost control of their communities and, in the deep South, they lost whole states to racial extremists who regarded black people as hardly more than dangerous beasts. Washington had negotiated a compromise with benevolent establishments only to find many of those establishments dissolved and replaced by ones that were positively malevolent.

The racial world changed; so also did the material one, and that change compounded racial difficulties. Washington's program was designed for the agrarian order of the nineteenth century. But even as Washington gained power, the United States and the South were moving into an industrial order that would dominate the lives of the great mass of working America in the twentieth century as agrarian orders had dominated their lives in the nineteenth century. There had been a place made for black people in the old order. In the new order, powerful elements would press for their exclusion.

According to Washington,
How would African Americans
achieve more rights?

W. E. B. Du Bois

Black Life in the South, 1865-1915

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The germ of the idea that proved to be the great alternative to the Washingtonian approach appeared a scant two years after the Atlanta speech. It was offered by W. E. B. Du Bois, who came to the lower South in 1897 to take a teaching post at Atlanta University. Du Bois, then twenty-nine, was a brilliant young man with degrees from Fisk and Harvard. He had studied at the University of Berlin under some of the foremost German scholars in that dawning age of social science, and he was completing a study of Philadelphia Negroes when he came to Atlanta. In 1897 in two little-noticed articles he introduced the revolutionary idea that the black experience in America was not only essentially different from that of the whites, but that it was necessarily and beautifully so. In Du Bois's interpretation, every people was imbued by God at creation with a distinct genius. Throughout its life each people struggled, often in confusion and seeming contradiction with itself, to realize its special nature. Different peoples came to new and higher plateaus of self-realization at different times. Black people in America, so recently out of slavery, were a child race, only then coming to the threshold of self-understanding. There had been painful struggle, and there would be further struggle in which the true nature of black soul would become increasingly evident. But even then, he argued, even in 1897 it was clear that blacks were a specially spiritual people, living in the midst of an increasingly materialistic America. They were also an artistic people given specially to music, to colors, and language. In time, by virtue of their own striving, the genius of black people would manifest itself, and they would find themselves in close harmony with the prime being, and, presumably, through Him, with all else. Thus the path of progress, the way to harmony and a perfect assimilation lay in the pursuit of blackness not whiteness, in black people seeking communion with black people. Self-realization would not be achieved one by one, but all together or not at all. Consequently, a certain amount of black exclusiveness, a certain amount of voluntary separation from whites and confederation in all-black enclaves was essential to salvation.¹⁵

Du Bois's racial philosophy was fundamentally different from that of Booker Washington, but the difference was not at first apparent. Indeed,

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the two men could come together readily and easily upon the ground of the necessity of concert among black people. Washington's program featured race pride, solidarity, and self-help. Du Bois, of course, could easily endorse these. Also, Du Bois was very much in favor of the economic improvement of black people, endorsed industrial education as legitimate, and applauded the rise of black businesses able to stand upon the patronage of black people. Most of all, Washington and Du Bois agreed on the necessity of black people organizing to pursue their interests. Finally, the principal and the professor both wanted full political and civil rights for black people, though they might differ as to how to achieve those goals. For a time, Du Bois could even be contented with a degree of gradualism. During the last years of the nineteenth century, he, along with nearly every other influential black leader in the South, applauded Washington's stance and followed his lead. Washington recognized Du Bois's talents and support. On three occasions he offered the young professor appointments at Tuskegee. On each occasion Du Bois turned down the offer with reluctance.

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Scholars have long noted that Du Bois was, himself, often at bitter variance with the parent organization of his magazine. The root of that variance was philosophical and lay in the fact that Du Bois was not an assimilationist in the traditional sense. The NAACP searched longingly for the key to the integration of blacks into the mainstream of American life. For it, an ideal society would be one in which color had no practical significance. Du Bois, on the other hand, thought of color as the key to salvation. Far from eradicating color consciousness, he thought it essential that it be promoted, developed, and refined. In insisting that blacks were innately and perpetually different from whites, Du Bois took a position that was virtually opposite from the integrative, assimilationist stance of the NAACP. Inevitably, in later times the difference would cause a breach. It came in the 1930s when Du Bois came out for black people voluntarily segregating themselves from whites in certain areas. Every other black leader, including his friends in the NAACP, vigorously opposed that program. Ultimately, Du Bois went his own way. He became a Marxist and settled himself in Africa, where he lived his last years.

According to DuBois, how would African Americans achieve more rights?

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DuBois was the black radical in race relations in America; he was the revolutionary. Before his time, no broadly influential black leader, nor any white leader who was sympathetic to blacks, held that black people were God-given and essentially different from white people, and perpetually and beautifully so. Indeed, placed along the scale of assimilation versus nonassimilation, the NAACP and the Bookerites fell upon one side and DuBois on the other. The NAACP was spread along the far end of the assimilation side and the Bookerites were arrayed on the same side but inward and closer to center, while DuBois would stand close to the end on the other side. In the interest of black people winning a greater share in the good things of American life, both Washington and DuBois would move closer to assimilation. But where Washington would aspire

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to achieve a perfect assimilation, DuBois would stringently resist that end. For him, blackness was to be preserved and perfected, never totally lost. DuBoisian assimilation would be of a transcendental nature. Black people had contributed and would continue to contribute to a total American culture that was both black and white, each pursuing its own identity and thereby to know itself and to know God, and through Him to achieve harmony.

DuBois's plan was more comprehensive, more cosmopolitan than any other. It is highly significant that he stood in sharp contrast to Washington and the NAACP in his attitude toward Africa. Before DuBois, black American leaders as a group exhibited little interest in Africa, and most of the interest shown was in Africa as a missionary field for the spread of "American" culture, not as the homeland of soul brothers from whom one might learn as well as teach. Washington's interest in Africa was practically nil, and the NAACP did not feature an African relations department. Probably most educated blacks would have agreed with the black writer Charles Chesnut, who confessed that he was "not greatly concerned about Africa except as an interesting foreign country."²⁰ But DuBois, as early as 1899, initiated the first Pan African conference. He was ecumenical in his blackness where his cohorts were provincial or, at most, national. Washington allowed black people to join his club if they were "good" blacks and industrious. The NAACP allowed them to join their club if they were "good" Americans. DuBois allowed them to join the club if they were, quite simply, black. Washington's tenure as the spokesman for the black mass was actually relatively brief. He enjoyed great strength from about 1895 to about 1907, and considerable strength until his death in 1915. The NAACP would have a very successful life for over half a century. Ultimately, however, it would find that it could go only so far in making white people out of black people in America. In the 1960s, DuBoisian soul would prove to be the most powerful organizing idea of all. It would pick up all black people, the lowly more easily than the high, and practically none would escape the pull of its gravity. Bookerism and the NAACP, after all, were for the qualified few, while Black Soul was for the masses . . . wherever they were.²¹

Goal: To evaluate the methods of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois.

Question:

Based on the information of Washington and DuBois, Which method was most effective in achieving greater equality for African Americans? Explain.